



Natural Resources Conservation Service
6013 Lakeside Blvd.
Indianapolis, IN 46278

January 30, 2008

INDIANA BULLETIN NO. 340-8-1

SUBJECT: SPA - Quality Assurance Policy and Procedures Changes for 2008

Purpose: 1. To put into temporary policy some changes to our quality assurance efforts in Indiana in order to evaluate new procedures during FY 2008 and determine what permanent changes, if any, need to be made to General Manual Quality Assurance Policy.
2. To provide an overview to employees of what efforts are being made to improve quality assurance activities and what additional efforts we will be working on for next year.

Expiration Date: September 30, 2008

Background: In our continuing efforts to become more efficient and still maintain high quality work, we are trying some new approaches to how we do quality assurance this year. The intent is if these changes prove to be effective and efficient, we will make permanent changes to policy.

The goal of quality assurance reviews continues to be improving the quality, efficiency, and effectiveness of delivering NRCS products and services to our customers. The process allows management to determine what is working, and to develop or adjust policies and procedures to make corrections or improvements. Through this we can identify; training effectiveness, the need for corrections, adjustments, or clarifications.

Annual Quality Review

We are changing the requirement, on a trial bases for this year, requiring that every employee's work in planning and applying conservation practices be checked once every three years, and each office be checked every year. These requirements are contradictory when there are only one or two employees in an office. In essence, each employee is checked each year. This year we will check the work of 1/3 of the employees performing conservation planning and application of conservation practices in the state. A check list has been issued to the areas which will be used across the state for tracking each employee's work by practice.

When an employees' work is checked, any certifications which require renewal will also be updated through the proper review process. This may mean that even if the employee received a certification last year, their name will be submitted for re-certification based on the AC's recommendation in order to get certifications on this set rotational/renewal schedule. Several standardized check lists and forms were issued to area staffs and will be used for consistency in documenting findings.

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Additional efforts include:

During this year, Technology staff will review policy and documentation requirements for case files and submit a new list of documentation requirements. Engineering staff and Technology staff will work together to eliminate planning and engineering staffs from duplicating their effort by checking the same documentation.

Once these reviews by technology and engineering are completed and recommendations are developed, we will modify QA checklists to reflect those changes for FY 2009, but for this year we will continue to check content of files as in past years.

Area Program Review

The state office will focus on reviewing the overall Areas' performance in following operational guidelines, priorities, and for conformance to policies. We will evaluate how well the area staff is supporting field offices and tech teams, as well as their efforts in coordination between area, state, CIT, and field offices.

Some of the areas of review include; conservation planning and technical skills levels, delivery and support of conservation programs, outreach and communications efforts within the area, civil rights and equal opportunity compliance, time keeping, procurement processes, property management, compliance to engineering policy, training needs and training provided, work flow process, use of technical tools and information, and NRCS relationships with our conservation partners.

Much of the review will be at the area office level, however, CIT and field offices will be visited. Visits to CIT and field offices will be done to determine how well the area has performed its oversight and evaluation functions, not to evaluate the employee or office performance. If deficiencies are found, what steps have the AC taken to correct them and what actions have been taken to reduce the potential for repeat occurrences of the deficiencies.

Field Office Program Quality Review

The only modification to the FOPQR at this time is that the area staff will be looking more closely at how NRCS program delivery and implementation is performed within the field office. They will review and evaluate the process of delivering NRCS programs from start to finish, from outreach and communications, to planning, meeting program requirements and policies, contracting, practice implementation, payments, and follow-up. Information acquired from the reviews will be used to determine what efforts are most successful and what can be done to improve operations in locations where the level of success is not as high.

These changes are being made with the consideration of employee's suggestions and we continue to welcome your input as we work through this process.

/s/

JANE E. HARDISTY
State Conservationist